

# A change of government in Denmark where the opposition just wins the general elections.

From **Corinne Deloy**

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## RESULTS

The leftwing opposition forces led by the Social Democratic Party (SD) won the general elections that took place in Denmark on 15th September. Together the four parties in the Red Bloc – the Social Democratic Party, the Social Liberal Party, the People’s Socialist Party and the Unity List – won 50.2% of the vote and 89 seats in the Folketing, the only chamber in Parliament, i.e. +8 in comparison with the previous election on 13th November 2007, pushing ahead of the Blue Bloc – formed by the rightwing – the Liberal Party, the Danish People’s Party, the Liberal Alliance and the Conservative Party – which won 49.7% of the vote and 86 seats (-3).

The Liberal Party, (V) led by outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, maintains its position as the country’s leading party with 26.7% of the vote and 47 seats (+1). It leads over the Social Democrats led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt who won 24.9% of the vote, i.e. their weakest result since 1906, and 44 seats (-1). The Danish People’s Party (DF), a far right populist party led by Pia Kjaersgaard, lost ground for the first time in its history; it won 12.3% of the vote and 22 seats (-3). The Social Liberal Party (RV), an opposition party led by Marghrethe Vestager, made a breakthrough with 9.5% of the vote and 17 seats (+8). Conversely the People’s Socialist Party is clearly on the decline, winning 9.2% of the vote and 16 seats (-7). The Conservative Party (KF), a member of the outgoing government coalition led by Lars Barfoed, won 4.9% of the vote (-10), losing more than half of its seats, thereby becoming the smallest party in the Folketing. The Liberal Alliance, formerly the New Alliance (Y) won 5% of the vote and 9 seats (+ 4). Finally the Unity List (E) a leftwing opposition party won 6.7% and 12 seats (+ 8).

Kaj Leo Johannesen and Aksel Johannesen were elected in the Faroe Islands; Kuupik Kleist and Aleqa Hammand in Greenland.

Turnout rose to 87.71%, very slightly over the rate recorded in the previous elections on 13th November 2007 (+ 1.18 point).

“We did it! Today is the day of change. We have shown again tonight that the Social Democrats are a major force which occupies a central position in Danish society,” declared Helle Thorning-Schmidt on the announcement of the results. “Together we can write history. We can say goodbye to ten years of bourgeois rule that has now ended so that we can offer a new government and a new majority to Denmark,” she added, saying that she would work towards building “a society that leaves no one out and in which everyone has a second chance.”

Outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen acknowledged defeat, congratulating his rival on her success and announced that he would resign the next

day. “Tomorrow at 11am I shall deliver my government’s resignation to the Queen. There is no longer any reason to remain in government,” he said on the TV channel TV2.

The general elections were dominated by the Danes’ concern about their economy. In a poll undertaken at the beginning of September, three quarters of them (74%) quoted this subject as being the most important issue in the election.

Denmark, which was considered to be top of the class in Europe in terms of its economy, only just managed to avoid recession (two consecutive quarters of negative growth) thanks to an increase of 0.1% of its GDP in the first quarter of 2011. The unemployment rate is

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rising and the country's budgetary deficit, which totalled 2.8% of the GDP last year, is due to rise to 68 billion crowns (9.1 billion €), i.e. 3,8% of the GDP in 2011 and to nearly 85 billion crowns (11.4 billion €) the following year (4.6% of the GDP). Four years ago in 2007 Denmark's budget was in surplus of over 80 billion crowns (5% of the GDP).

Helle Thorning-Schmidt criticised Lars Lokke Rasmussen's outgoing government for having failed to recover growth and for having increased the budgetary deficit. She suggests that Denmark should have "a new start". To do this she supports raising public investments in education and infrastructures and to raise taxes on the highest revenues; she also defends the retirement system that the outgoing government wanted reform. The leftwing opposition plans to inject 18 billion crowns into the economy (2.4 billion €) funded by loans and a 12 minute increase in working hours (one extra hour in the week). "We are not joining the austerity band wagon," said Helle Thorning-Schmidt. The left has promised the return of budgetary balance by 2020.

"We are sure of one thing only, and that is that the new government will make it more costly to be Danish. We already have the biggest public sector in the world. We should stay on the path which brought us through the crisis reasonably, provide Denmark with optimism and not create obstacles to private consumption nor should we make life more expensive for the Danes," declared Lars Lokke Rasmussen, who had asked voters to remain loyal to him to prevent the left from undoing everything that his government had achieved; he warned of promises that were "funded by tax increases which will lead to a reduction in household consumption." The outgoing Prime Minister, whose party had probably lost momentum, after ten years in power, was not heard and economic difficulties prompted the Danes to sanction the outgoing government. In terms of immigration – a subject that has divided the Scandinavian kingdom for a long time – Helle Thorning-Schmidt said that she wanted to establish a more human system of political immigration than that implemented by the previous government – however she said that she would not go back on most of the measures taken over the last ten years by the latter. "One of the reasons why immigration was not a stake in the election was that the left adopted the same attitude as the right on this issue," declared Peter Kurriild-Klitgaard, a political science professor at the University of Copenhagen.

Aged 44, Helle Thorning-Schmidt is a graduate in political science from the University of Copenhagen and of the Collège d'Europe in Bruges. She is married to Stephen Kinnock, son of the former leader of the British Labour Party, (1983-1992), Neil Kinnock.

Joining the Social Democratic Party in 1993, she first was head of the secretariat of the party's delegation in the European Parliament in 1994 and 1997 before becoming an international consultant for the Danish Unions' Conference (LO). In 1999 she became an MEP, then entered the Folketing after the general elections of 8th February 2005.

After the election that was won by the right and after the resignation of the previous social democratic leader, Mogens Lykketoft, Helle Thorning-Schmidt stood to succeed him. On 12th April 2005 she was elected to lead the party with 53.2% of the vote, beating Frank Jensen who was positioned more to the left. She then became the first woman to lead the social-democrats.

In this position she has worked in support of bringing her party closer to the People's Socialist Party and the Social Liberal Party and recommended a unified government supported by the Red and Green Alliance if the leftwing won. "She has been able to heal wounds that date back to the 90's and rebuild unity in the party thanks to her qualities as a leader, which include both authoritarianism and team spirit," says Rune Subage, a political expert at the University of Aarhus.

Having succeeded in federating the Danish left and in winning the elections she is now due to become the first woman Prime Minister in Denmark's history.

Although the Red Bloc's victory is undeniable, the left only won by a narrow majority. The formation of the next government may be difficult. The coalition led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt is effectively heterogeneous. Hence, the Social Liberal Party (RV), that lies in the centre of the political scale supports a liberal economic policy and tried, during the campaign, to minimise the role that the People's Socialist Party and the Unity List would have in the future government. These parties disagree on several major issues: retirement reform, immigration, taxation and economic policy.

Moreover the change in government should not make any deep changes in Denmark. "The differences between the two ends of the political scale are minimal. The changes will not be very big," says Bo Sandemann Rasmussen, professor of political science at the University of Aarhus.

**General Elections results of 15th September 2011 in Denmark**

Turnout : 87,71%

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats
<b>Liberal Party (V)</b>	948 291	26,7	47
<b>Social-Democratic Party (SD)</b>	881 534	24,9	44
<b>Danish People's Party (DF)</b>	436 335	12,3	22
<b>Social-Liberal Party (RV)</b>	336 149	9,5	17
<b>People's Socialist Party (SF)</b>	326 118	9,2	16
<b>Unity List (E)</b>	236 982	6,7	12
<b>Liberal Alliance</b>	176 473	5	9
<b>Conservative Party(KF)</b>	174 563	4,9	8
<b>Christian-Democrats (K)</b>	28 157	0,8	0
<b>Independents</b>	1 832	0,1	0

Source : institut danois de la statistique (<http://www.dst.dk/valg/Valg1204271/valgopgmid/valgopgHL.htm>)

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